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## “From, In and Through His Hands”

Sermon Series: “God and Global Warming”

Sunday, September 7, 2008©

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Scripture Lesson: *Colossians 1:15-20*

He’s got the whole world in His hands. Let us pray.

*Lord God, you are the owner of it all. We, this earth, the galaxy, all that is seen and unseen belongs to you and comes from your hand. Help us to realize that this morning Lord and live comfortably in your grip and grace. Reveal your Word to us this morning as you pour your Holy Spirit into us. We ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I was talking with someone a few weeks ago and telling them my plan for this sermon series, talking about my absolute passion for this topic, how I think it is such an important thing upon which to preach, and why every Christian needs to hear about it. He just stared at me for a second and said three words, “Are you crazy!” Indeed, as I have told people that I am preaching on global warming, the reaction has been lukewarm at best. I even had someone tell me they were sorry they couldn’t be here. “I’m taking my family on a four week vacation,” they said. “Where are you going?” I asked. “To the Baptist Church,” they replied.

I am not a scientist. You don’t pay me for my scientific views, for which we can all be very thankful. The point of this sermon series is not to convince that you that the earth is getting warmer or getting cooler. My aim is that even if you are a skeptic or you have an *Inconvenient Truth* downloaded on your Ipod and watch a clip every morning as your daily

devotional, you will find something in this sermon series to think and pray about. Global warming is also political. Jesus Christ has something to say about our politics. Christ is Lord of the ballot box and Lord of our governments. But we all have enough politics going on in our life right now. We don’t need it to invade the sanctity of this hallowed hall of worship.

What I am is a theologian. You pay me a salary to preach and teach about this Book. And this Book has something to say about where our earth came from, Who made it, where it is going, Who is taking it there, and our role as human beings in all of this. And that is what I plan to preach on today and for the next month.

Today, I want to answer the question, “Can we save the planet?”

You literally cannot read the news today without hearing about the terror of global warming and how it is up to human beings to save the planet. A few months ago, Ted Turner spoke about the dire consequences which the world faces in just thirty or forty years because of global warming. “Most of the people will have died and the rest of us will be cannibals...Civilization will have broken down. The few people left will be living in a failed state — like Somalia or Sudan — and living conditions will be intolerable.” Al Gore predicted two and a half years ago that we have only ten years to act to save the planet. In a speech given this past July, he said that because of global warming

“the future of human civilization is at stake.” A few weeks ago, another political leader was asked to explain her stand on an issue and she responded, “I’m trying to save the planet. I’m trying to save the planet.” A children’s book I saw on the shelves at Barnes & Noble was titled, “How To Save the Planet.” On its front cover was a superhero flying away from the earth carrying two trash bags, one labeled “smog” and the other “carbon dioxide.” The first chapter reads, “So why does the earth need saving? Well, to put it bluntly, because of us...the way we live is damaging the very thing which gave us life in the first place—planet Earth.”

Underlying all these claims, I think, is a theology. And I think the little children’s book states this theology succinctly. “We need to save the Earth because it is the Earth which gave us life in the first place.”

Now, at first blush, to most people, there is nothing wrong with this statement. Indeed it seems noble. It seems altruistic, even courageous. But is it right?

The story goes that there was a little boy growing up who wanted a bicycle. His family, however, was not very wealthy and he was too young get a job. Day and night, he talked about riding a bike. One evening, his father, who loved him very much, came home with a bicycle as gift for his son. This made the boy very happy and he loved riding the bicycle up and down his street. His sister, however, was not pleased. She said to her brother, “You know, of course, that your bicycle cost a lot of money: more than mom and dad could afford.” She reminded him that their dad’s hours at work had just been cut and their mother was expecting another child. “They will have to sell our house to pay for your bicycle. We’ll be out on the street because of your bike,” she scolded him. The little boy was filled with guilt, and every time he even looked at his bike any kind of joy which he once had was gone—believing that his expensive bicycle would bring terrible ruin to his family. He began to think that if he could only sell his new bike, he could save his family. The boy’s life was an unhappy one.

The theology behind saving the planet because of global warming begins to go wrong with the idea it is

the earth that gives us life. The earth is God’s tool to give us life. But a tool cleft from the hands of the craftsmen is useless. *Genesis 2:7* teaches us, “*Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*” We could also look to *Psalm 139*, “*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” (v.13,14)

We see again just where the earth came from in the Scripture lesson for today: “*He (meaning Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...and he is before all things and in him all things hold together.*” (*Colossians 1:15-17*)

What does this passage mean? It means that Jesus Christ not only made the earth but that He is THE FORCE which holds together the earth and all the cosmos.

If it is simply the earth that gave us life, through some random, natural process; then Jesus Christ is not the Creator and He is not on the throne of His creation and the whole thing is just as likely to fall apart as it is to hold together. How does believing this affect us?

Psychiatrists at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Australia have discovered a new psychological disorder called “Climate Change Delusion.” The first patient they diagnosed was a seventeen year old boy who had stopped drinking water. He had come to believe that his consumption of water could lead to the deaths of millions of people through dwindling water supplies. Now this may be an extreme example. But consider the e-mail I received from a friend of mine who has a Ph.D. in Chemical Physics. He is one of the most intelligent, kind and conscientious people I have ever known. But he lives in fear for his family. In an e-mail sent four years ago, he said that he thought we had three years to do something about global warming or else he believed that his children would not have a planet to live on someday. He said it was literally causing him sleepless nights.

Some global warming true believers, in the interest of saving the planet, have proposed regulating how much toilet paper people can use, designed sleeves which are detachable from shirts on which people can wipe their mouths rather than use paper napkins, getting buried without a coffin, teaching children in public school to become vegetarians, filling the blue skies with yellowy sulfur to block out the rays of the sun, and even legislating how many children a couple can have. In fact, a common refrain among the global warming true believers is that the only way we can save the planet is by reducing the number of people on it; at least one insists by more than 85%, from 6.7 billion to less than one billion. Holding beliefs like these are the consequence of forfeiting our faith that Jesus Christ is the Creator and that He sits upon the throne of the cosmos.

So, if Jesus Christ is not the Creator, if Jesus Christ is not on the throne, who is? It's simple...we are. Here is a shopping bag from Wal-Mart. You see on it a picture of the earth with the caption, "It's in your hands." Our very own recycling bin out in our church parking lot says something similar, "One planet. One chance." Inferring, we had better get our care of the earth right, or else.

In Greek mythology, there was a titan named Atlas. As his *punishment*, he was condemned to hold the earth and sky on his shoulders. By taking Jesus Christ off the throne, we are putting the earth and the sky squarely on our puny shoulders. And we will simply crumple and crumble under that punishing weight.

Every kid going to Sunday School learns a song and I am sure you can sing it with me. But do you know all the verses? "He's got the whole world in His hands. He's got my sisters and my brothers in His hands. He's got the sun and the rain in his hands. He's got the moon and the stars in his hands. He's got the wind and the clouds in his hands. He's got the rivers and the mountains in his hands. He's got the oceans and the seas in his hands. He's got you and me in his hands. He's got everybody here in his hands. He's got the whole world in his hands." WE DO NOT.

So, let's get back to our original question. Can we save the planet? I think the answer is **absolutely not**; and if we try to, we are likely to do more damage than we may already be doing. The darkest chapters of history have come about when human beings have, even with the best of intentions, assumed a role reserved only for God. The planet is already saved. Jesus Christ is in the middle of saving it even as we sit in the middle of this sanctuary. God created the earth to redeem it not to see it burned to a cinder. Jesus Christ is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

Can we make the earth a better place? Has God called us to take care of His stunningly beautiful planet, to be a steward of all that is seen and unseen? Absolutely, yes. But being a steward is very different than being a savior.

Someone might say, "how do you know God will save the planet? How do you know God's plan is not to doom us all and this rock we're on? How do you know that God is not watching and waiting to see how human beings react to the crisis of global warming and based upon that reaction, He will save the planet? How do you know that we have not made God so angry that He is just sitting this round out?"

The answer is simple. He Promised He wouldn't. The great meaning of Jesus Christ is that God is with us, no matter what. We could literally look to hundreds and hundreds of passages of Scripture which teach this timeless truth. But there is one that is particularly appropriate to speak about global warming.

Again, every child knows the story of Noah. The world was wicked; every thought human beings had was evil, continually. So, God flooded the earth; killing everything but Noah's family and the animals he brought two by two onto his gopher wood ark. The rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights; but eventually the waters receded, the ark landed on dry land, and the animals and the family (very thankfully, I am sure) left the ark and breathed fresh air for the first time in at least 6 weeks. Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered a sacrifice. And God made a promise, a covenant to never again destroy the earth.

*“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every best of the earth. I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off again by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy all the earth.” (Genesis 9:9-11)*

And this was to be the sign of His covenant for all the generations of people to ever walk on the face of the earth, *“I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.” (Genesis 9:13-15)*

How do we know that God won't sit this one out? How do I know that the seas won't rise and wipe out the dry land? How do I know that saving the planet is not up to me? How do I know that God will make the earth new rather than destroy it?

God made a promise. And the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving maker, keeper and redeemer of the cosmos does not make promises He does not intend to keep. Every time I see a rainbow in the clouds, I am reminded that He is before all things and in Him they hold together.

The young boy with the bicycle was finally able to sell it. It pained him greatly to do it, but he did. With tears in his eyes, he took the crisply folded bills and placed them on top of the white t-shirts in his father's dresser.

Days passed and the boy missed his bike terribly. He sat on his porch watching the other children whizz up and down the street, pedaling and laughing as they enjoyed the summer. Walking through the garage one day, he was shocked and delighted to see his bike. Attached to it was a note in his father's handwriting. “My son, this bike is my gift for you. Your job is to love it and take care of it. My job is to hold together our house and our family.”

And love it and take care of it he did. Unlike the other kids, he never just threw his bike down on the

ground, but always leaned it against a tree or a fence. He never left it out in the rain or where a car could back over it. He washed it. He replaced the tires. He saved his allowance to put on new grips and a seat. And when his baby brother was old enough to ride, he received a used bike which looked like it was brand new. The boy did his job and the father did his.

He's got the whole world in His hands and, in those two nail-scarred hands, He will hold it all together.

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<sup>1</sup>Mike Morris, “Global Warming Could Lead to Cannibalism,” found at AJC.com, April 3, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>David Stout, “Gore Calls for Carbon-Free Electric Power,” found at NYTimes.com, July 19, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>This quote is attributed to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Bolt, “Doomed to a Fatal Delusion Over Climate Change,” found at HeraldSun.com.au, July 9, 2008.

<sup>5</sup>These ideas were both floated by Climate Activist Laurie David in a blog. The toilet paper idea I have seen raised by others as well.

<sup>6</sup>This idea was proposed by in papers submitted by the Royal Society in Great Britain. It was also floated by Nobel laureate scientist, Paul Crutzen, among others.

<sup>7</sup>This is the idea of Paul Watson, the former President of Greenpeace. He is also on record calling human beings, “The AIDS of the earth.”

<sup>8</sup>I realize this is a somewhat unusual interpretation of this story. Some people, to whom I have offered it, have accused me of being too literal in reading the story of Noah. I do not think this interpretation is dependent upon a literal, historical reading of the Noah story—although I do believe there was a great flood and this story tells of it and interprets it. The purpose of Divine revelation is to reveal the character of God and this story certainly does that consistent with the larger Biblical witness. My interpretation of the story builds upon that witness.